

Public Hearing – February 25, 2022
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Katie S. Dykes

House Bill No. 5140 – An Act Concerning the Hand-Harvesting of Horseshoe Crabs in the State

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding **House Bill No. 5140 – An Act Concerning the Hand-Harvesting of Horseshoe Crabs in the State**. The purpose of this bill is to ban hand-harvesting of horseshoe crabs in Connecticut, which would functionally implement a commercial fishery moratorium in the state as almost all commercial harvest of horseshoe crabs in Connecticut occurs via hand-harvest.

The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) appreciates the intent of this bill but **cannot support** the implementation of a fishery moratorium for horseshoe crab at this time. DEEP fully agrees that more restrictive fishing regulations are needed for horseshoe crab in Long Island Sound (LIS). Data from multiple long-term scientific surveys indicate that horseshoe crab populations in LIS have declined to low levels of abundance, and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) has concluded that the horseshoe crab populations in the “New York Region” (Connecticut, New York, and northern New Jersey) are in “poor” condition and in need of conservation.

In August 2019, the ASMFC Horseshoe Crab Management Board requested that Connecticut and New York take state-level regulatory action to constrain harvest of horseshoe crab in their respective commercial fisheries (New Jersey has had a moratorium on horseshoe crab harvest in place since 2006). In response to this request, DEEP initiated a public scoping process to gather input on changes to horseshoe crab management, worked with the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to develop a consistent regulatory strategy for the shared waters of LIS, and then proposed a suite of regulatory changes via the standard regulations process. DEEP’s regulations proposal would reduce the commercial daily possession limit for horseshoe crabs from 500 to 150 crabs and implement two 5-day “lunar closures” in which commercial harvest would be banned for important spawning periods around full/new moons in May and June. Implementation of these regulatory changes will achieve regulatory consistency with New York, produce an estimated 62% reduction in annual commercial harvest of horseshoe crab, and afford additional enhancement to horseshoe crab reproductive success via the proposed lunar closures. The proposed suite of regulatory changes received substantial favorable comment during the public comment period in December 2021.

DEEP feels that its proposed regulations package, which is nearing completion (anticipated submission to Legislative Regulation Review Committee in March or April), is the most appropriate path forward for horseshoe crab conservation at this time, as it will substantially curtail commercial harvest of horseshoe crab while stopping short of a full moratorium that would pose undue economic hardship on commercial fishers. However, the agency is committed to continued close monitoring of LIS horseshoe crab populations and would propose additional

fishery restrictions up to and including full moratorium if horseshoe crab populations do not show signs of recovery following implementation of new fishery restrictions.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Harrison Nantz, the Department's legislative liaison, at Harrison.nantz@ct.gov.